

Even if a presumption has been in effect for 10 or more years, many ex-POWs will not have been rated as totally disabled for the minimum period required at the time of their deaths. This may occur for a variety of reasons. For example, the POW may not have filed a disability claim as soon as the presumption was enacted, or it may have taken a while for his claim to be adjudicated. Alternatively, the POW could have had a lower disability rating that worsened over time.

This issue was first brought to my attention by a very close friend of mine, Wayne Hitchcock. Wayne is the past National Commander of the American Ex-Prisoners of War and is now seriously ill.

After talking to Wayne, I introduced a bill to waive the 10-year time requirement for the surviving spouses of former POWs. H.R. 784, has received strong bipartisan support. To date, the bill has over 100 cosponsors, including 23 members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I would like to thank full Committee Chairman BOB STUMP and Ranking Minority Member LANE EVANS, as well as Benefits Subcommittee Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, JACK QUINN and BOB FILNER, for their strong support of my legislation.

We all know that military service does not take place in a vacuum. Many POWs experience unimaginable horrors. Today, many continue to experience prolonged battles with various illnesses and other disabilities. Consequently, their spouses have spent years caring for them after their release from prisoner-of-war camps. These women deserve DIC benefits.

I am pleased that the House of Representatives is acting on this important issue. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2280.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 2280. This Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1999, would give veterans a cost-of-living increase, expand eligibility for compensation and survivor's benefits, and accelerate progress on the World War II Memorial. This package contains a wide range of proposals to improve veteran's benefits.

Some 1,646,700 veterans live in the state of Texas alone. It is through their unwavering devotion to duty and country that our nation has come through two World Wars and numerous costly struggles against the forces of aggression. American veterans have provided the leadership, courage, and even their lives time and time again. These genuine heroes have often been ignored and denied their proper place in America's melting pot. We need to remember that America owes these men and women the best it can offer because they have given us the best they could when America was in need.

I am pleased that this bill will provide a cost of living adjustment to the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

In addition, the bill addresses the burial needs of veterans. It directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish four new national cemeteries. During a recent visit to Arlington National Cemetery, I was moved by the beauty and reference, which was reflected on this small hillside in Virginia. This bill will ensure that all of our veterans will receive the same compassionate treatment, which has already been shown to those soldiers who now rest in these grounds.

I am also pleased that this bill addresses America's homeless veterans. The measure authorizes \$100 million over five years for the homeless veterans reintegration program. This provision will allow community based employment programs that are working with our homeless veterans to continue their work within the communities they serve.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that all of my colleagues will join me in supporting this bill which continues our nation's efforts to honor the commitment it made to the veterans.

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2280, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1999. I commend the Chairmen and Ranking Members of both the Full Committee and the Benefits Subcommittee for their work. This bill brings together elements on benefits improvements from numerous bills.

It would give veterans a cost-of-living increase expand eligibility for compensation and survivor's benefits, and accelerate progress on the World War II Memorial.

In addition to the approximate 2.4% COLA, this bill would improve the benefits claims for certain surviving spouses. This change is long overdue.

This bill would also enhance the oversight of the claims processing system. We have experienced long delays in Texas and throughout the country, and this bill takes steps at addressing this problem:

Enhancing the quality assurance program of the Veterans Benefits Administration; and

Requiring quality reviews at the Compensation and Pension Service, the Education Service, the Vocational Rehabilitation Service and other programs.

It expands to members of Reserves and National Guard who served at least six years eligible for housing loans on a permanent basis.

I look forward to these elements being included in any package which is ultimately enacted into law.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I have no further questions for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2280, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

SUNDRY MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sundry messages in writing from the President of the United States were communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

CONGRATULATING AND COMMENDING VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the joint

resolution (H.J. Res. 34) congratulating and commending the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.J. RES. 34

Whereas the organization now known as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States was founded in Columbus, Ohio, on September 29, 1899;

Whereas the VFW represents approximately 2,000,000 veterans of the Armed Forces who served overseas in World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, and Bosnia; and

Whereas the VFW has, for the past 100 years, provided voluntary and unselfish service to the Armed Forces and to veterans, communities, States, and the Nation and has worked toward the betterment of veterans in general and society as a whole: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress—

(1) recognizes the historic significance of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (the VFW);

(2) congratulates the VFW on achieving that milestone;

(3) commends the approximately 2,000,000 veterans who belong to the VFW and thanks them for their service to their fellow veterans and the Nation; and

(4) calls upon the President to issue a proclamation recognizing the anniversary of the VFW and the contributions made by the VFW to veterans and the Nation and calling upon the people of the United States to observe such anniversary with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. STUMP).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.J. Res. 34.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arizona?

There was no objection.

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. STUMP asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STUMP. Mr. Speaker, H.J. Res. 34 is a joint resolution congratulating and commending the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

This year marks the VFW's 100th anniversary. The VFW consists of approximately two million veterans of the Armed Services who have served overseas in World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Bosnia. They have been very active in community and civic affairs.

Some of their more notable accomplishments are, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of volunteer work at VA hospitals, Veterans Services officers helping other veterans with their benefits claimed each year, and the Voice of